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South Beach Ride

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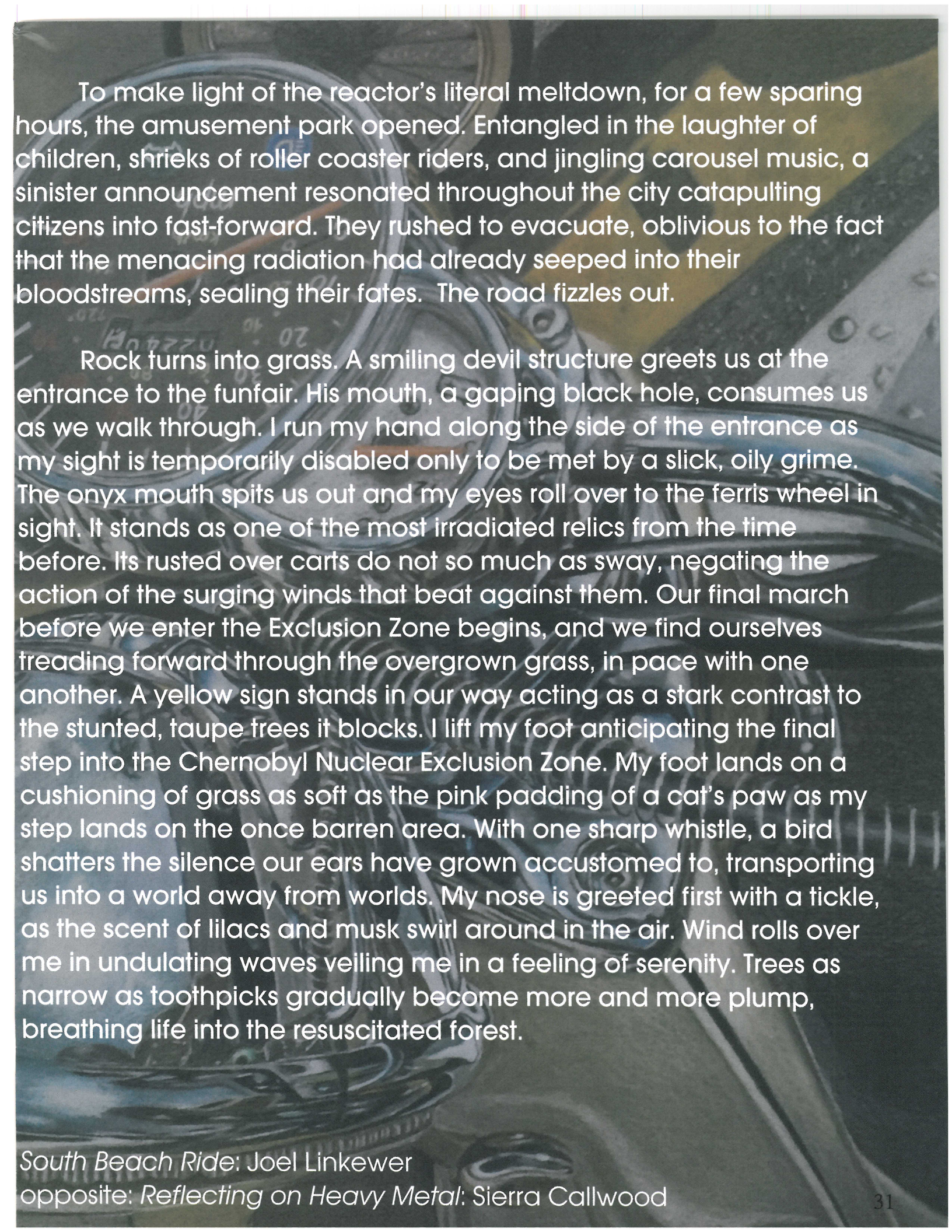


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To make light of the reactor's literal meltdown, for a few sparing hours, the amusement park opened. Entangled in the laughter of children, shrieks of roller coaster riders, and jingling carousel music, a sinister announcement resonated throughout the city catapulting citizens into fast-forward. They rushed to evacuate, oblivious to the fact that the menacing radiation had already seeped into their bloodstreams, sealing their fates. The road fizzles out.

Rock turns into grass. A smiling devil structure greets us at the entrance to the funfair. His mouth, a gaping black hole, consumes us as we walk through. I run my hand along the side of the entrance as my sight is temporarily disabled only to be met by a slick, oily grime. The onyx mouth spits us out and my eyes roll over to the ferris wheel in sight. It stands as one of the most irradiated relics from the time before. Its rusted over carts do not so much as sway, negating the action of the surging winds that beat against them. Our final march before we enter the Exclusion Zone begins, and we find ourselves treading forward through the overgrown grass, in pace with one another. A yellow sign stands in our way acting as a stark contrast to the stunted, taupe trees it blocks. I lift my foot anticipating the final step into the Chernobyl Nuclear Exclusion Zone. My foot lands on a cushioning of grass as soft as the pink padding of a cat's paw as my step lands on the once barren area. With one sharp whistle, a bird shatters the silence our ears have grown accustomed to, transporting us into a world away from worlds. My nose is greeted first with a tickle, as the scent of lilacs and musk swirl around in the air. Wind rolls over me in undulating waves veiling me in a feeling of serenity. Trees as narrow as toothpicks gradually become more and more plump, breathing life into the resuscitated forest.